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Scientific Pedagogy as Research on Practices - Sketching „Quality Development“, „Competences“ and „Assessment“ in Pedagogical Regards

Anja Kraus

Abstract

Schools and other institutions for Bildung are, as the whole public sector in Western countries, more and more following the ideology and the strategies of the "New Public Management". However, a pedagogical relation of an adult to a child or to a young (or aged) person embraces difference as its basic principle as well as the demand of a completely unselfish and also highly reflexive attention to the needs of the child or young (or aged) person.

The aim of this contribution is to reflect on concepts of „quality development“ and such of „learning“, „competences“ and „assessment“ in pedagogical regards.

Schools and other institutions for education are, like the whole public sector in Western countries, more and more following the socio-economically reasoned ideology and strategies of the so called "New Public Management", formally conceptualized e.g. by Hood (1991). "New Public Management" denotes government policies that, since the 1980s, aim at modernizing and rendering the public sector more efficient through a better management of the public budget, as by enforcing competition and by emphasizing economic and leadership principles. "New public management" addresses beneficiaries of public services much like customers, and conversely citizens as shareholders. Ferlie et al (1996) describe "New Public Management in Action" in terms of a government of public services by markets, managers and measurement.

The terms "quality" and "competence" are not originated in the field of Educational Sciences (cp. Honig & Neumann 2004), out of a pedagogical perspective education not at first appears in terms of competition.

Principally seen, pedagogy aims at developing the emancipatory potentials of the "responses" of each individual to the different questions of life. Pedagogy focuses the enabling of the individual to get aware of everyday and specialist questions, making him/her capable of working out a range of possible answers as well as reflecting these answers in terms of effecting a situation for the benefit of the social community, of society and environment as well as of her/his own good (see Kraus 2010). A pedagogical relationship of an adult to a child or to a young (sometimes also to an aged) person is supposed to be carried out by a constant, in a pedagogical way "loving" attentiveness for the initiatives of this person.

Pedagogical “love” embraces difference as its basic principle, as well as the demand of a completely unselfish and also highly reflexive attention to the needs and the perspective of the child or young (or aged) person. At the same time, every pedagogical relation is directed to sooner or later surpassing the asymmetric social relation which is significant for it, in that by pedagogy the learning person should be empowered to self-determination and responsibility for him-/herself, for others and for the environment. To focus on both and to do both at the same time is processed in the first hand by practices that bridge the contradiction inherent in the aim of pedagogy and thus in all pedagogical approaches: to build up an asymmetric relationship in order to surpass it. There is no human development without the efforts of pedagogues or adults to focus on the needs of the educees and, at the same time, to focus on the aim of their optimal emancipation, that is to say on developing their ability to judge, to act and to care for themselves, for others and for their general (and professional) environment independently from the educative instances. Ultimately this implicates independence from the State. A State which is not providing for this aim discredits itself as an authoritarian instance deciding on persons, pedagogical relationships, pedagogical situations and pedagogical questions.

The focus of this essay is on classroom education. In this regard traditionally, the most applied reference sciences are Curriculum Studies in the Anglo-American language area and Didactics in the German-Scandinavian as well as Slavic and Roman language area. Besides that there is, mostly in French context, a tendency rather to strengthen the diverse disciplines of domain specific knowledge at the expense of pedagogy. In this contribution it will be argued for a perspective on pedagogy that came up within Educational Science as a scientific discipline: the practice-approach. Especially, the performativity-theoretical interpretation of practice-research will be unfolded.

Didactics goes back to Wolfgang Ratke and John Amos Comenius in the 17th Century, and “Bildung” to Wilhelm von Humboldt in the 18th Century. Both concepts are culturally coined by Christian beliefs, especially by the dualism (of spirit and body, here) of philosophical and political-practical orientation. Seen from a historical point of view, an enormous load of normativity is the result; however, this is only one of the many explanations of the merely normative signature of theoretical pedagogy. Only recently, in the last hundred years, pedagogy more and more has become a scientific discipline. Normativity did not disappear, as pedagogy always also implies the general norm of pedagogical desirability and its detailed normative consequences, but, as we have seen, pedagogy cannot be reduced to norms.

Within Didactics, for a long time “Bildung”, that is to say the normative idea of a personality acquiring knowledge, and, in doing so, developing social and cultural responsibility, has been in its focus. (cf. Klafki 1985) Today, moreover all forms of formal and informal learning, also the professional formation of all kinds, are interpreted as the attainment of practically adoptable knowledge, e.g. as the “development of competences”. There is thus a paradigm shift. In this shift the idea of “Bildung” and, with it, Didactics is successively put aside.

This marginalization leads to an overall weakening of pedagogy as a scientific discipline as well as a professional field.

However, seen from the pedagogical point of view, neither “Bildung” nor knowledge, also practically adoptable knowledge, in the following “competences”, is the very core of pedagogy.

Pedagogy is rather ruled by, resp. it is practices.

Georg Breidenstein (2008, p.206, transl. by A.K.) writes about practice-research: “With the accentuation of practices, the view is withdrawn from the *actor* [stressed by G.B.]. So it is not about the question of who carries out which practice, but conversely about who or what is *involved* [stressed by G.B.] in a specific practice. Human bodies, as well as artifacts are considered as *participants* [stressed by G.B.] of practices. [...] A practice *consists* [stressed by G.B.] of certain routinized movements and activities of the body.” Hannah Arendt ([1958] 1998, p.183f.) determines action in a similar sense, namely by the placing of a thread into a fabric that one did not make oneself. Although action is certainly started by individuals, it refers to others, to a social structure, where it not only finds its justification and its continuation, but which also helps to determine the mode of action. Action is thus always tuned intersubjectively and it is bound to a socially mediated position. Thus, every action has its actual place in a social and material context.

While the concept of “Bildung” and that of a “development of competences” are theoretical-hypothetical and highly normative definitions of education, the definition of pedagogy in terms of practices is rather simple and practical, certainly even self-evident. Practices in the pedagogical fields can only then be grasped or described as “Bildung”, or as a “development of competences”, if the practices that aim on pedagogically desirable learning are prevalent, convincing and successful. “Bildung” as a highly normative concept presupposes the attainment of general knowledge as the very ground and also even guarantee for socially responsible acting. The concept of a “development of competences” assumes the achievement of applicable skills to be of high, even the highest social value.

However, not all the practices we find in the different pedagogical fields are pedagogically desirable. We all know very well that rather the contrary is the case. However, practices in the pedagogical fields have a strong tendency to get directed to pedagogically desirable aims: Thus any action in a classroom, like opening the window, explaining something etc., *may become* pedagogically normative in a pedagogical field – or it *may not*. The same is true for those actions of the pupils that tend to be regarded in terms of pedagogically desirable behavior, as relevant efforts and as learning – or as its contrary. Whether a single practice unfolds pedagogically desirable potentials, or not, is dependent on all the acting persons in the pedagogical situation. In the pedagogical field thus “gebildete” *and* “ungebildete” as well as competent *and* incompetent *practices* are taking place and are of educational relevance. Not at last, not-learning is as well as learning an integral part of pedagogy and should not be forgotten, or overshadowed by the presuppositions of “Bildung” or “competences”. One has e.g. *to realize not to know* something in order to learn it. This approach is comparable with the concept of a “negativity of ‘Bildung’”, coined by Benner & Englisch in 2005, which links “Bildung” in the first hand to manifold experiences of lack.

If pedagogy is ruled by practices, then the prevalent topic of research in the Educational Sciences is the diverse practices in the pedagogical fields. In theoretical regards these practices turn out as “Bildung”, “competences”, or as something else. There is thus not automatically “Bildung”, or a “development of competences” in a situation signified from outside as a pedagogical situation.

Before this argumentative background, pedagogy *in general* does not allow for a uniform theory. The multifaceted and complex pedagogical reality moreover can hardly be represented

by the linearity and coherence of theoretical knowledge. One meets a variety of individual utterances of children and youngsters as well as the professional practices of the pedagogues, which bring about different possible interpretations and reactions influencing the self-understanding and the learning of the individuals and also of the professionals in different ways. In pedagogical practices different objectives of action and heteromorph normative orientations of the acting individuals come into play. The result of many empirical studies (Tenorth 2007, Kagan 1992 et al.) is, therefore, not at all surprising, that the professional theoretical knowledge appears as fragmentary and sporadic in the pedagogical fields. Moreover, the fact gets into sight that theoretical as well as practical pedagogy is in the first hand and fundamentally formed by the theory-practice-relationship structured by and within practices. The fact that there are many possible scientific and pedagogical-theoretical interpretations of the relationship of theory (research) and practices in pedagogy must not be read as a disadvantage, but as a chance, as these differences might give a hint to an answer to the question how practice bridges the gap to theories, or is, in some way, connected to theories. (Cp. Kraus 2015) “Bildung” and the “development of competences” are thus different approaches to, or definitions of the theory-practice-relationship - shaped by practices. This view opens up a broad research area that has to be unfolded and systematized at another place.

Here, the practice approach to pedagogy will be deepened in terms of the form of professional knowledge it presupposes for pedagogical acting. On this ground, a pedagogically coined “quality development” of classroom education can be outlined.

As already pointed out, the practices in the pedagogical fields are in general ruled by a whole range of different norms, such as developmental needs, knowledge formats and forms, social expectations, influences of mass media, governmental papers and political ideas etc. There is thus a very complex normative frame for education. Seen as a practice, educating, especially teaching presupposes the abilities to perceive, to understand and to reflect creative capabilities as well as the ability and power of judgment. In the classroom commonly the teacher teaches and the pupils are supposed to actively undergo learning processes. To act reasonably and appropriately in individual cases means to take the factors into account that are relevant for the understanding of a situation at hand. This understanding is, beside other abilities, based on “pedagogical tact”, understood by Johann Friedrich Herbart (1969 [1802]), Herman Nohl (1997) or Max van Manen (1995) as holding back as a pedagogue and waiting, or maintaining a certain distance, so that the educee may unfold his or her own initiatives. The ability to cope actively with a pedagogical situation as well as self-restraint and modesty are important success factors of teachers in school - not only by being a model, also by giving the children and youngsters the possibility to learn mutual respect and norms in terms of social relationships and persons at hand. Helmut Heid (2013, p.254) writes: “Children and adolescents do not have to respect norms and values, instead they can learn to respect the dignity and rights of the persons in front of them as well as critically and competently participate in discourses in which one argues on the relevance and quality of intersubjectively verifiable opinions.”

The pedagogical tact is a special kind of knowing.

However, it is up to the teachers to continuously create a pedagogical situation in the framework of the school, respectively to realize and professionally influence the special

learning conditions of the pupils in terms of reaching the objectives that are distinctly set for their learning and for the teaching. The central task of teachers is to constantly provide for and to structure opportunities to learn in a formal way. This involves the choice of specialized subject contents, of processes and of procedures, a reference to regulative-social and philosophical ideas as well as a focus on such objectives and values that are directly related to the individuals (e.g. to the ability of someone to make a decision on a specialist topic). It is central to classes that the teacher makes the contents compatible with the diverse previous experiences of the individuals as well as with their actual learning situation. In order to meet these requirements, the professional has to ascertain the structures of the many parallel and overlapping activities in a group of learners. The teacher coordinates these activities and restructures and promotes them towards the common aim. Each pupil should be able to reach this aim. Therefore, the teacher focusses the significance and the meanings the pupils and s/he share in terms of the topic of the lesson; creating meaning thus forms the steady center of a class. Accompanying her/his teaching and educative practices by reflection, the teacher analyses the complex events in the classroom and in school according to developmental categories of learning, personality and behavior. S/he continually coordinates the results of this analysis with her/his ongoing didactical analysis of the subject or topic, and with her/his (e.g. pedagogical) coordination work related to this, as well as with the logistics necessary for it. The teacher reconciles the results of her/his didactics and diagnostics also with the constitution of a sense that surmounts the actual situation in order to be able to check whether her/his general social and interpersonal, pedagogical, disciplinary and didactical objectives are met. If this is not the case, s/he has to find alternative paths of initiating learning. The challenge of initiating learning, of approving and of assessing the learning processes requires a perception that is directed to the very objectives of a lesson as well as to general educational objectives. Besides that, the ability is needed to reflect the statements of the different acting persons and to align them with common objectives and, as far as possible, also with a collectively shared meaning. Such a meaning is, in the best case, the very topic or subject of a class, underpinned by general and special educational objectives. However, there is no other way for the teacher than to derive her/his didactical and pedagogical considerations from her/his anticipations of such a creation of a common meaning.¹ These anticipations can only be of a rough and limited character. However, the teacher analyses the communicative processes in the classes, while being him-/herself involved in them and even controlling them. S/he analyses these processes with the aim to set the accents necessary for making desired learning processes most likely to occur. This implies the ability to reflect actually applied or upcoming knowledge formats in terms of their relevance to the special topic of the lesson. Manifold knowledge formats (not only cognitive-rational ones) must be at the disposal of the teacher, and s/he must be able to interpret them in terms of their potentials for learning and of the actual educational situation. The teacher must thus be able to apply the formats of knowledge *mutatis mutandis*. The synchronous arising of the different forms and formats of knowledge can be mastered only situationally.

The character of this knowing can be described by the performative paradigm that arose in the Cultural and, accordingly, in the Educational Sciences. Christoph Wulf & Jörg Zirfas (2007,

¹ Cf. publications on the directives of lesson planning (e.g. ESSLINGER-HINZ et al. 2007)

p.9, transl. by A.K.) write: “A performative perspective rejects a general and complete method and interpretation of reality in favor of a relativist interpretation fitting to the context, producing a plurality of idiomatic gestures and contextualizing phenomenology.” Thus, from the viewpoint of performativity, the genesis, the process character and the consequences of the (visible) events are brought into view; modalities, functions, effects, contexts and the contextualization of a thing or an event in a context of practices are thus of central interest. Hans J. Wulff (1998, p.219f., transl. by A.K.) writes: “In a first step, performativity is defined as an activity that brings up the horizons of meaning by itself”; and Christoph Wulf & Jörg Zirfas (2007, p.18, transl. by A.K.) point out: “Performative realities are *flat realities* [stressed by C.W. & J.Z.], as they focus primarily on the events and their effects, and they are *rich realities* [stressed by C.W. & J.Z.], because they let the events come into view”. Performative acts are emergent, they produce situated effects and identify and exemplify themselves. An example of this is Heinrich von Kleists ([1805/6] 2004) „About the gradual formulation of thought during speech“. Only *while* speaking, and not beforehand, meaning, sense and the structures of our orientation come into sight, new ideas and impulses of various kinds come up.

The performative paradigm thus opens up the possibility to overcome the concentration of education on rational, linguistically symbolized knowledge and metrical explanatory models by opening up to diverse cultural modes of teaching and learning.

Seen as practice, education needs, so to say, a special kind of scientific approaches. There seems to be a whole range of choice, such as quantitative and qualitative, metrical and hermeneutical scientific approaches in the Humanities. All these approaches include important perspectives for pedagogy. This cannot be deepened here.

The aim of this contribution is to sketch concepts of „quality development“ and such of „learning“, „competences“, and “teaching”, and „assessment“ in pedagogical regards.

To start with “quality development”:² Seen before the argumentative background unfolded above, quality development is already an integral part of all pedagogical concepts, as pedagogical practices are directed towards the development of abilities, knowledge and judgment. It thus comprises pedagogical diagnosis and planning, the reflexive practicing and the documentation of pedagogical situations. However, pedagogical approaches are seldom systematically reflected. In order to meet this desideratum, teachers and students should learn to develop exemplary strategies and procedures. They should become acquainted with scientific methods in order to be able to systematically reflect on processes of teaching and learning and such of quality development. Through a continuous reflection on the various aspects of quality of classroom events and on the potentials usable for such a quality development, specific projects for development could be prepared. Possible task areas are e.g. the evaluation of the progress on the school level: the further development of procedures, structures and training, e.g. in regard to personal development, internal democracy and/or resources. Another aim is the optimisation of the classroom organisation and the reflection of it through a proposed training on improving didactics and a refining of educational profiles. By this means, the quality of the teaching and learning-options, e.g. class organisation,

² See also attachment.

subject-specific issues and questions of explorative or experience-based learning etc., can be developed out of the perspectives of the acting persons.

When it comes to learning seen from a pedagogical perspective, „[...] the how of learning retreats into darkness.“ „Just what one wants to see stays invisible [for a direct observance, A.K.], such as: the beginning of learning, its course, its dramaturgy“ (Meyer-Drawe 2008: 90). Strictly speaking, we are not able to observe a learning process, or the acquisition of competences. Also the practitioning of teachers to a great deal *retreats into darkness*. That is to say, neither the performance of learning, nor the pedagogical performance, e.g. the creation of a pedagogical relation, nor the initiating of learning processes are a matter of mere control. In the center of the teaching profession are moreover dilemmata that are unexpectedly appearing in a class, irritations and incalculable events that go along with the well-skilled acting in the field etc. There is an inevitable relativity of a presentation, happenings on the “back-stages” (Zinnecker 1978) of the classes, a polymorph normativity and diverse ambiguities, a continuous confrontation with one’s own prejudices and those of others. These performative events play a central role in the classroom and they always stand in the professional focus of the teaching person.

Seen pedagogically, a development of competences is based on an understanding of challenges and it means working on a realistic, always changing and unfolding sense for one’s own self-efficacy. The integral moment of such an individual developmental process is productively exceeding knowledge (resp. pre-knowledge) by getting to know something different and new. In this regard experiences play an important role. As the experiences of the pupils in a classroom are very different, they should be built up by common experiences and by providing for variable ways of learning. (Cp. Dewey 1947)

The first aim of assessment in the frame of pedagogy is to support the learning, teaching and the development of competences in terms of developing the self-efficacy of the assessed persons. “Assessment” therefore has to focus on the development of clear, argument-based and critisizable criteria. In terms of enabling the ones who are assessed to show their knowledge and to take responsibility for it, the criteria must express both, the achieved knowledge and the attained know-how-to-apply-it. The best is that the criteria of assessment are developed by, or together with the assessed persons. The form of assessing should follow the specific tasks and challenges, including different approaches and contexts of learning or meaning-making. This is possible by varying the tasks as well as the interpretations of a topic. Plural perspectives and models of the world can best be presented and reflected by different forms of assessment (tests, protocols, learning agreements, portfolio etc.).

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Attachment:

The Researching School – Quality in Progress
A Concept for a Dialogue-Oriented Quality Development at a Bilingual High School in
Cooperation with a University³

Quality development is thought as cooperation of a school with a university. It is thus an integral part of the concepts of these institutions. The project 'The Researching School - Quality in Progress' aims at providing support for pupils and teachers in acquiring learning skills and competence in applying democratic thinking and procedures. It is based on both, existing and emerging structures, and on the regularly assessed requirements. The teachers and students become acquainted with the methods and levels of evaluation and learn to develop exemplary strategies and procedures in order to reflect on processes of teaching and learning as well as processes of quality development. Through the continuous reflection on the various aspects of quality and on the potentials usable for such a quality development, individual projects for development (see below) are prepared. - The quality development takes place in the following task areas:

1. Evaluation of the progress on the school level: further development of the procedures, structures and training, e.g. in regard to personnel, internal democracy and resources;
2. optimisation of the class organisation and its reflection through proposed training on improving didactics and refining of educational profiles; quality of the options of teaching and learning; e.g. in class organisation, subject-specific issues and questions of explorative, or experience-based learning;
3. material aspects and resources are taken into account as given work factors;
4. the development of a model school which encompasses approved proposals for didactic and structural innovations.

The principles of the school development altogether aim at the symbiosis of academic research and school development and engage teachers and pupils in dialogues which are regarded as the genuine resource for the actual work. The responsibility for one's own teaching and learning is thus already expressed structurally. Accentuates is thus a participatory quality development, i.e. a professional learning community, with the focus on experience-based and explorative learning. Education is seen as situated processes that are directed towards participation, inclusion and individual support. Quality development, therefore, implies and aims for competent and self-structured learning processes. It does not only take heterogeneous starting positions and cultures of learning (gender, migration, different experiences of learning and levels of proficiency etc.) into account, but it also takes up diverse and differing context- and topic-oriented criteria of quality. Tasks for progress are formulated based on the pre-existing competences of the participants in the responsible

³ Developed by the author in cooperation with Uta Schorlemmer and in reference to the quality concept of the University of Education Ludwigsburg (summer term 2012, see: https://www.ph-ludwigsburg.de/uploads/media/Konzept_zur>Weiterentwicklung_des_Qualitaetsmanagements_an_der_PH_Ludwigsburg_01.pdf)

agencies (see below) and induces specific schemes for development. The development of criteria and methods of assessment and documentation form an important part of the quality development. In an open-shaped and organisationally structured interaction space those directly engaged in or affected by the school development can articulate their needs, interests and expectations. Desired is a transparency of all measures of quality development. Within the formative evaluation processes certain quantitative are combined with mostly qualitative survey methods.

The process of quality development can be described as a continuous spiral of reflections on the options for improvement of the quality of school and schooling according to the following model:

The strategic decision-making bodies in the school (the academic project supervisor and the project manager in the school) cooperate with the operative organisational agencies or persons. These two levels of academic-strategic and operative quality development are not hierarchical but two equal aspects of the one project.

The strategic aims of development are brought up by the acting persons in the field and re-formulated by the academic supervisor and project manager, while allowing room for interpretation of these aims just as varied as the academic constructs concerning them. If needed, the academic supervisor and the project manager moderate and coordinate the otherwise inherently dialogical process of quality development.

The following platforms are provided for the operative project development:

1. Work Groups for Quality Development

In these work groups the development projects get linked to strategic aims and are legitimized on the backdrop of the school concept. The work groups conceptualize development projects, which they can delegate, or carry out themselves. In this process they take utmost care that the quality standards, aims and procedures are applied as they are described above.

2. Digital Services Office

A central component of the project is an online-platform (digital services office). It provides information on the academic procedures and the instruments of the dialogically structured evaluation. These are linked with further services, e.g. consulting etc. A meticulous and clear documentation of development projects that are carried out by the academically supported agencies (documentation of decisions, data, publications such as studies, educational material, compilations of didactic methods, applications, reports etc.) in the digital services office should allow to track the spiral structure of the quality developmental process. The documentation will be provided by the project coordination (school office). The academic assistant and the ancillary colleagues will perform an advisory function.

3. Individual Projects

Individual academic studies and further options for the teachers to enhance their competences in regard to optimizing and evaluating processes of teaching and learning (consultations, series of lectures, vocational training, supervision, conferences etc.) are arranged and guided by the academic assistants and the ancillary colleagues. They also give advice to the pupils in regard to their learning.

4. „Critical Friend“

The external perspective is ensured by the external monitoring by a "critical friend".